Aporrheton 5

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Many traditions about the Craft are scattered throughout recent books; a sizable bunch is the 161 "Craft Laws" you can find in Lady Sheba or in June Johns. Many of these traditions are merely definitions of what the Craft is, and so of the context within which the other traditions should be understood; they are "true" merely because (and insofar as) they are internally consistent. In contrast, some of the other traditions seem to be shrewd, hard-won observations about how psychic energy (as dealt with in the Craft) seems to work, and THESE are the important ones.

The psychic reality that these traditions concern has been called by many names: spiritualists call it "the upper astral plane"; Jungians, the "superconscious"; the Bhagavad Gita, "the True Self"; many mystics, the "godhead"; Isaac Bonewits, the "Switchboard"; and very much so on. Any such name is an attempt to map (part of) a psychic reality that seems all too willing to accommodate itself to any map you use, and you will get nowhere in trying to understand that reality if you don't keep its Plasticity firmly in mind. In the Craft we conceive that reality as the Goddess (as #11 below states); She is both very real and a metaphor. She is real because human energy goes into making Her real; She exists as a "thought form on the astral plane," yet She can manifest physically whenever She wants to. She does not exist independently of mankind, but She is most thoroughly independent of any one person or group. (And precisely the same is true of any concept of divinity that people put energy into maintaining.) She is a metaphor because, great though She may be, She is finite, like any other human concept, whereas reality is infinite. And why do we need the Goddess, or any divinity at all? Because the human mind seems unable to grasp an undifferentiated infinity. By creating our own divinities, we create mental steps for ourselves, up which we can mount, toward realizing ourselves as divine.

The Craft Laws, then, are not "13 Commandments" from on high; they are merely unproved hypotheses about how SOME psychic reality seems to work. They should be treated like any other hypotheses: respected as being the best guesses going, but continually tested to find out how valid they are and to generate better guesses. Naturally, you cannot test them by breaking them, any more than you can test the law of gravity by jumping off a ten-story building. Instead, you draw conclusions from them, or base predictions on them, and try workings to see if the latter hold up. The 13 below are ones that have held up so far under such testing; some we had in an earlier set of 13 did not. In compiling this set, I culled through all the traditions I could find, picking out especially (or thinking up) the most general statements, which would include many of the other traditions as special cases; you should be able to spot

examples of this by carefully comparing Aporrheton 10 with this one. Certain of the laws here (the ones typed in all caps) seem necessary and reliable to us, and we will not tolerate any bending (let alone breaking) of them, for the reasons discussed under #12 below. Many of the rest are here, not because we understand them, but because we don't.

I always approach traditional occult systems (astrology, the Tarot, the Craft, etc.) on the assumption that they consist of a terse, multileveled coding of hard-earned information about something real and important. It is almost as silly to think you've discovered everything such a system might mean as it is to think it meaningless. The only way to find out what such a system means is to get in there and work with it until you speak its language fluently. Then you will likely find (at least, this has been my experience) that the system gives you a map of reality, but of many places, not just one place, that it gives you a way to work with classes of relationships that hold for many different kinds of people, things, and situations. That is, these traditional systems are very much like non-quantitative algebra or calculus; a symbol in one of them is not going to have an invariant and simple meaning, or even the same meaning in two different contexts, anymore than X is going to have the same numerical value in two different algebra problems.

It therefore seems safest to keep these Craft laws whose meanings are not obvious in mind, and hope that further "experimentation" will shed some light on them. Of course, to get any results at all in dealing with psychic phenomena, you have to be optimistic and open-minded. If you already hold a firm belief that you know what the Craft Laws mean, or that they are "Absolutely True," or the opposite, then your mind is closed, and you can't learn anything new. That is, you're not supposed to "believe" in the Craft Laws, or memorize them; you're supposed to UNDERSTAND them, else you've missed the whole point of why we have them.

1. YOU CANNOT USE THE ARTS OF THE CRAFT TO CREATE OR INCREASE BAD KARMA, EXCEPT FOR YOURSELF.
2. YOU MAY NOT USE THE ARTS OF THE CRAFT TO AFFECT ANOTHER PERSON IN ANY WAY, UNLESS YOU HAVE THAT PERSON'S EXPLICIT PERMISSION.

These two are best discussed together, since they replace the inadequate statement one often finds that "You may not use the arts of the Craft to work malevolent magic." Notice that the first one says "cannot," being an observation of fact, whereas the second says "may not," being a statement of ethics.

The first law states that, IN THE LONG RUN, you can harm no one but yourself. You cannot benefit from trying to harm another, because you are part of the fabric of reality, not separate from it. You get whatever you give, because getting and giving are the same, just as the trough and the crest are the same wave./ If you set up a pattern of nasty, callous selfishness around yourself, that is what you have projected onto the world, and that is all you will experience. If you act out of genuine affection and concern for others, you receive their affection and concern as well. The psychic (or life) field seems to have a single polarity: to create positive effects for yourself, you must create positive effects for others. And this observation applies not just to the arts of the Craft, nor to all the psychic arts, but to life in general.

Now, what the second law points out is that it is the OTHER person's opinion that determines whether the effects of what you do are positive or not. This law is the equivalent of the Craft's version of the "Golden Rule": "Do unto others not as YOU wish to be done under, but as THEY wish to be done unto-for their tastes may damned well differ from yours." (Thus this law, most usefully, eliminates any arguments over how one defines "good" or "evil.") It follows that you may not do something for what YOU think is someone else's "own good"; you have no right to make that decision. You may not even work a healing unless you have permission from the person to be healed; it is unethical to hit an unprepared person with a jolt of energy. You may work without prior permission for someone whose karma you are already PERSONALLY involved with (as a mother for her child, a man for his wife, etc.), but you may not accept anyone's opinion that another would give permission if asked; no matter how close two people might be, they neither own one another nor carry each other's karma, and so cannot give such permission to another.

3. You cannot use the arts of the Craft to win fame, fortune, power, or any other sort of material or social advantage.

This again is an observation of how all the psychic arts work, not just those of the Craft. WHY they work thus is another question-THAT they do work thus is well-known. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that if your major motive for working is (or becomes) a desire for fame, fortune, etc., you soon get into a head-space where psychic abilities simply cannot function; many erstwhile psychics throughout history have lost their abilities and become charlatans, because they did not know this rule. You can (as many people do) make your living by a psychic art, as long as you charge only enough to live comfortably by your society's standards; it is only going on a "power trip" that would endanger your abilities. Similarly, doing trips on people without their knowledge (or the magician's favorite project, raising "demons" in order to control them) is another sort of power trip, and will have exactly the same effect on your abilities. A more traditional Craft statement of this rule would be, "The arts of the Craft are the gift of the Goddess; if you misuse them, She will take them back."

4. You cannot use the arts of the Craft for show, in pretense, but only in earnest, and only in need.

If you work a ritual, it will have effects, whether you think you want it to or not. Therefore you cannot "pretend" to throw a hex, for example; the Lady does not recognize pretense. On the other hand, you cannot work the arts successfully just because you WANT to, as a head trip; the Lady won't cooperate. You have to need the energy or the information for some real purpose, else you can't tap into it. (At least, this is what meaning I have seen in this law so far.)

5. The arts of the Craft can only be worked in a circle with at least one other person of the opposite sex.

This "law" is actually just a set of definitions, though important ones, as follows. (a) The arts of the Craft are defined as those that will work only under these conditions; psychic arts that work under other conditions are thus not necessarily part of the Craft. (b) A coven consists of at least one man and one woman; it cannot consist of all men or all women. (c) If you're working by yourself, you are working as a magician, not as a witch-but you are still obliged by your oaths to the Lady to observe the other Craft Laws. (For more on this last point, see #12.)

6. A man must learn the arts of the Craft from a woman, a woman from a man, except between parent and child.

Since #5 defines the arts of the Craft as those that only work in the circle, obviously they can only be learned in the circle. If you're working with just one other person, that person must be of the opposite sex, else the arts won't work, and nothing can be learned. Thus it seems logical that this tradition applies only to a one-to-one teacher-apprentice relationship. If you're not in the circle, and/or are teaching a mixed group of men and women, obviously there's no problem. (This tradition MAY imply that the arts WILL work for two women if they are mother and daughter, or for father and some, since part of the key to the working, and the learning, seems to be the emotional closeness between the two; consider section IV, last paragraph, in Aporrheton 10.)

7. You must always pay whatever price is asked, without haggling or complaining, when you buy something to be used for the Craft.

The Gardnerian Craft Laws (section IV, paragraph 4, of Apor. 10) allow the arts of the Craft to be used to persuade someone to sell something, as long as his asking price is met, but this would violate our Law #2. In contrast, this law here is a safeguard against using your psychic talents not-quite-consciously to take unfair advantage of someone.

8. You cannot belong to more than one coven at a time.

Any two covens will likely have rather different symbolic systems for their workings, different understandings of the Craft Laws, and so on. Trying to work with both would then tend to confuse you, snarl up your communication lines to the Lade, and reduce the efficiency of your learning and working. Of course, if two covens do have identical systems (which could only happen if they shared a common ancestry), they could be considered the same cove, for the purposes under discussion here.

In its original context (see section III, Apor. 10), this law seems merely an observation of fact: even if you're working with two or more covens, you will only BELONG to one of them; your loyalty will be with that one, and if there were a parting of the ways, you would stick with it. Obviously, in time of persecution, divided loyalties and disagreements could be a source of great danger, and would have to be forbidden. Also, in a Craft structure where the High Priestess has final authority within each coven, she would not much like having a Witch she is trying to train be influenced by another Priestess. True, these considerations don't apply to us, but they are valid as reasons for the tradition.

9. None can coven with others they cannot agree with.

Stated this way, this law becomes an etymological tautology, for "coven" means "to agree" (or "to come together"). The more those in a coven can agree on the interpretation of the Craft Laws, on the symbolic system used for workings, on the purposes of the workings, the greater the coven's effectiveness will be. Naturally, minor disagreements will crop up regularly in a group of individualists; they are not what this law concerns. Rather, it applies to disagreements (or bad interpersonal feelings) that are strong enough that they are amplified by the group field, make the meeting unpleasant, and so make it impossible for the coven to work. For this reason-not, one may hope, out of mere in-group exclusiveness or arbitrariness-a coven must select its members carefully for compatibility. Also, since a coven is necessarily a "small group," many normal small-group processes will operate in it. These can be powerful, and emotionally very heavy, but there's nothing mysterious about them. Don't mistake them for something occult; that would lead you up a blind alley.

10. You must not betray the secrets that cannot be told.

The secrets in question here are Her secrets, the ones discussed in the Caution to the Novices. Insofar as these Craft Laws are simply observations of how psychic reality works (and it is for that, really, that we should value them) then they are "self-enforcing" like any other statement of fact. So what this law means is: (a) Don't commit suicide; (b) Don't violate your own sense of your self-integrity; (c) Don't "sell your soul to the devil"; (d) If you stick your finger in a flame, you'll get burned.

11. ALL POWER IN THE CRAFT COMES FROM THE GODDESS.

This law is another observation about how psychic reality works. The energy that is raised in the circle comes not from any one person, nor from all the persons in the coven as individuals, but from somewhere else: from the Goddess, or from some source ever further beyond. Such energy, like all psychic energy, comes THROUGH you, not from you; it is not your personal property, for you are merely a channel for it, a custodian of it. You do "own" your body and your individual personality, and you are entitled to the fruits of your labors, but the energy is not yours to exploit for your own benefit, for any human being could (potentially) learn to do anything you can do. Therefore, although you have a right to earn a living, the Craft is free to all, being a gift of the Goddess: you may not charge anyone even a penny to be initiated into the Craft or to learn its arts. Of course, you should insist on having your actual expenses covered; the Craft Laws do not require you to operate at a loss or to coddle freeloaders. But you may not make money from practicing the Craft as a religion, and if you try, you will lose all access to the power. This law also means that the only genuine initiations in the Craft are those worked (though not necessarily directly) by the Goddess Herself. That is, if you have the power from the Goddess, credentials from other people are unnecessary, and if you don't have any power from the Goddess, credentials from other people are useless. Hence there can be no authority in the Craft outside each coven.

This law also provides another definition: any power that comes from the Goddess could be part of the Craft; so any poet who has experienced the reality of the Muse is, to that extent, a Witch. Conversely, any energy that cannot be conceptualized as coming from the Goddess (and apparently there ARE such forms of the energy) is definitely not part of the Craft. (The tradition that the Priestess is supreme within the circle also appears to be a special case of this law, insofar as only the Priestess can incarnate the Goddess.)

12. IF SOMEONE INTENDS TO HARM YOU, YOU MAY USE THE ARTS OF THE CRAFT TO RESTRAIN HIM FROM DOING SO, BUT ONLY IF ALL IN THE COVEN AGREE THAT HE WILL IN NO WAY BE HARMED BY THE WORKING.

No matter what the provocation, trying to harm another will only create bad karma for yourself. So, although you have an absolute right to protect yourself, you must not retaliate. As is said in K'ung Fu, "Solve the problem, no less, no more." The reason why the coven must discuss the situation and agree on the workings is twofold: (1) to allow cooler minds to prevail, for it is when one acts on impulse, out of anger, that one is most likely to overstep the line between self-defense and aggression; and (2) because those in the coven, having taken an oath to help one another, and being linked by the generation of the group psychic field, will all share to some extent in any bad karma generated by any member's misuse of the arts. If you are one who can only learn the hard way, say, by sticking your finger into a flame, you are of course free to burn your own fingers-but NOT if you are holding someone else's hand, which is exactly the situation if you belong to a coven. For its own self-preservation, a coven must therefore retain the right, as a last resort, to expel (and cut loose from the karma of) any member who persists in interfering in other people's lives without their permission or, of course, who attempts even blacker workings.

13. Always remember that all mankind and all creatures are equally children of the Goddess; therefore never boast or threaten, or do anything that might disgrace Her or your brothers and sisters in the Craft.

To blather thoughtlessly about the Craft, especially to persons who have no business knowing about your coven's affairs, not only drains your own energy and that of your coven, but also is a form of boasting, of using the Craft for self-aggrandizement, that will get you into the bad head-space law #3 warns about. More obviously, threatening to "hex" someone, even though you THINK you have no intention of doing so, violates the intent of laws 1 through 4, because you are playing games with the Lady, who just might decide to act on the threat, and because you are using the Craft (especially if you are known to be a Witch) to influence another against his will and to get your own way; furthermore, making such a threat reinforces the false impression most people have of the Craft, and so disgraces the Goddess. Again, since anyone could learn to do anything you can do, being a Witch doesn't make you any better than anyone else; put on airs, and the Lady will deflate you. Perhaps a good rule of thumb about discussing the Craft

with outsiders is this: once you are convinced that someone's interest is sincere, then answer questions, fully and freely; but don't just volunteer information that has in no way been asked for, else you risk burdening that person with more information than he or she is able to cope with.

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